



The Problem of the Color Line in Du Bois's "The Souls of Black Folk"

Alina Degünther

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Seminar paper from the year 2014 in the subject American Studies - Literature, grade: 2,0, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, course: Explorations of Epistemology and Race in Turn-of-the-Century (19th/20th) American Literature, language: English, abstract: This work examines the social relations between African Americans and white Americans caused by the veil of race in Du Bois's "The Souls of Black Folk". It also highlights the effects

this social conflict had on African American identity, the main reasons that fostered the division of American society, and possible solutions offered by Du Bois in his effort to address the reader in order to tackle this conflict.

First, this work explains Du Bois's theory of "the Veil of Race" as a social construct. For Du Bois, the meaning of race is the production of racial hierarchy, ideology and dominant culture. Next, this work highlights the problems caused by the veil of race within the American nation, such as social segregation and racism. It gives examples of the separate lives of blacks and whites and racial prejudices toward African Americans. It reveals how Du Bois identifies with these problems from his own experiences and explains why the dominant culture is unable to see those who reside on the other side of the veil.

Further, this work reveals the effects of the fatal division of the American nation on African American identity. It represents Du Bois's concept of "double-consciousness", that is the duality of African American identity of being both a "Negro" and an American. Double-consciousness has dehumanizing effects on the spiritual life of black people. In this respect, this work gives examples of strong emotionalism and inner degradation of black people. It illustrates African Americans' feelings of discouragement and pain, with the sorrow songs as a reflection of the black peoples' despair and Du Bois's own experience of misery. Finally, this work reveals how Du Bois tries to appeal to the reader. Du Bois emphasizes humanity, education, and self-knowledge as the key to respect, equality, freedom, and democracy. He also puts emphasis on spiritual power over the power of social hierarchy and dominant culture, which serve the interests of the rich. To conclude, Du Bois's main goal is to negotiate between the two worlds in one country in order to achieve integration of the "Negro" race into US society. He urges the reader to understand the cultural demands of black people and advocates one nation.

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